

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 29		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Classical history and art: transforming public understanding		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> From 2000		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Mary Beard	Professor of Classics	1984 – Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> From 2016–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>For over 20 years Beard has communicated her research, carried out at the University of Cambridge, on the classical world to millions of TV viewers and readers of her books, enhancing popular knowledge of ancient history and culture. She has written and presented landmark television programmes, including <i>Ultimate Rome</i> (2016), two episodes of <i>Civilisations</i> (2018) and <i>The Shock of the Nude</i> (2020). These have introduced very large audiences, in the UK and overseas, to a new understanding of, and engagement with, the classical world. Reinforced by other forms of public engagement (lectures, blogs, radio programmes, newspaper articles, social media interaction), this has increased popular and media interest in antiquity (from the National Theatre to TV's 'Grand Tour'), and attracted more people to formal study of the classical world. Her television programmes have also positively impacted UK- and Algerian and Moroccan cultural relations.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Beard is active in research at the highest level across a wide range of fields in the study of Classical Antiquity at Cambridge, focussing in particular on the material culture of both ancient Greece and Rome (and its reception), and on the political, social and cultural history of ancient Rome. One particular quality that distinguishes her work is that it is highly original and well regarded within the academic field of Classics (she is a Fellow of the British Academy and <i>Laughter in Ancient Rome</i> (2014) [R1] is the publication of her Sather Lectures, the most prestigious classical lectures in the world) and also consistently written to be accessible to a serious and committed general reader. <i>Pompeii</i> (2008) [R2] won the 2009 Wolfson History Prize, for combining 'excellence in research with readability'; <i>SPQR</i> [R3] has been translated into 26 languages, [text removed for publication].</p> <p>A large part of Beard's research has focussed on particular ancient sites and monuments. One key strand across this work has been a commitment to see the surviving monuments of antiquity in a wide historical context, up to the present day. <i>The Parthenon</i> [R4] was the first modern study of the temple to integrate fully its Christian and Islamic phases into the history of the Classical building (drawing, for example, on Christian sermons preached in the building and Ottoman travel writing). The same priorities guided her history of <i>The Colosseum</i> (2005) [R5] (written with Keith Hopkins) and of <i>Classical Art</i> (2001) [R6] (written with John Henderson), both notable for integrating ancient material with its reception. Another key strand is her commitment to drawing out the implications of some of the most technical historical and archaeological research for wider social and political history. So <i>The Roman Triumph</i> (2007) [R7], showed the relevance of apparently narrow questions of epigraphy and Roman Law to a radically new understanding of the ceremony of triumph; <i>Pompeii</i> [R2] exploited up to the minute work on epigraphy, art history and various aspects of bio-archaeology to throw light on the wider social history of the ancient town; <i>Laughter</i> closely analysed literary and</p>		

philosophical texts (from Aristotle to Macrobius) to point up the simultaneous differences and similarities between modern and ancient worlds, and to explore their implications for our scholarly and popular approaches to antiquity.

These approaches also grounded the research that was published in *SPQR* (2015). This book attempts to develop a new narrative of the long history of the city of Rome, inflected by contemporary scholarship inside and outside of Classics (foregrounding, for example, questions of migration and citizenship). It integrates considerable original research on specific topics (for example, on the Twelve Tables, and the Fourth Century BCE) into the wider context of Roman society, politics and culture.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Beard, M. *Laughter in Ancient Rome: on Joking, Ticking and Cracking Up* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press 2014), ISBN: 9780520277168

[R2] Beard, M. *Pompeii: the life of a Roman town* (London: Profile, 2008) ISBN: 9781846684715

[R3] Beard, M. *SPQR: a history of ancient Rome* (London: Profile, 2015), ISBN: 9781846683817

[R4] Beard, M. *The Parthenon* (London: Profile, 2002; revised 2010), ISBN 9780674055636

[R5] Beard, M. and Hopkins, K. *The Colosseum* (London: Profile, 2005), ISBN 9780674060319

[R6] Beard, M. and Henderson, J. *Classical Art from Greece to Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ISBN 0-19-284237-4, [DOI](#)

[R7] Beard, M. *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), ISBN 9780674032187

[R6, R7, R1] were published by major university presses, with the usual review processes. [R2, R3, R4, R5] while written for a more popular audience drew upon years of original research on their respective topics.

[Leverhulme funded research](#) leave (MRF-2014-003 RG75569, October 2015 – September 2017, £113,076)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact falls into four categories: **(1)** communicating Classics worldwide; **(2)** introducing new audiences to the ancient world; **(3)** encouraging engagement with Classics in formal education; **(4)** influencing wider cultural and social practice.

#### 1) Communicating Classics Worldwide

This impact case rests on a series of television programmes based on Beard's research: *Pompeii* (BBC1, 2016); *Ultimate Rome: Empire without Limit* (4 programmes, BBC2, 2016); *Julius Caesar Revealed* (BBC1, 2018); *Civilisations* (2 programmes, BBC2, 2018) and *Civilisations on Your Doorstep* (BBC2, 2018); *The Shock of the Nude* (2 programmes, BBC2, 2020). These programmes have attracted large audiences on the BBC (for example, *Pompeii* over 4 million, *Julius Caesar Revealed* over 3 million; the episodes of *Ultimate Rome* have been seen by an audience averaging over 2 million each) [E1]. YouTube has continued their popularity [E2], and they have been shown on television worldwide (*Julius Caesar* is typical in being sold to c.150 territories worldwide from Hungary to Haiti, Algeria to Australia [E1]). Beard's *TLS* blog and other social media platforms (she has over 280,000 Twitter followers) further extend her reach [E2].

The impact of these programmes has been widely recognised: e.g. 'She looks at the world through the deep lens of the ancient world, and she shifts arguments', (p8) BBC Director of Arts, *Guardian*, 30 Jan, 2018; '<her approach> helped us to understand what had really been

going on, instead of seeing history as a set of facts to be memorised' (p19), *Daily Mail*, 27 April, 2016. They have brought critical acclaim: e.g. the Naomi Sargent Award for Excellence in Broadcasting 2017; *Shock of the Nude* was shortlisted for a Grierson award (the premier UK documentary prize) in 2020 (p22); in 2016 Beard was shortlisted for the Grierson 'Best Documentary Presenter' for *Ultimate Rome* (p34-35); in 2019 she was nominated for the *Telegraph* 'Everywoman in Travel' award, 'for raising awareness, and proving the importance, of ancient sites around the world' (p38) [E3].

## (2) Introducing New Audiences to the Ancient World

With combined television viewing figures running to millions, Beard has developed these landmark programmes beyond the screen. *Civilisations* involved public engagement events across the country (the National Gallery, in Cambridge, Liverpool, Belfast, and at an Open University on-line seminar). A free app. was developed alongside the series with c. 250,000 downloads, allowing viewers to follow up the objects discussed [E4]. In connection with a lively public debate sparked by *The Shock of the Nude*, she wrote about (classical and other) nudity for the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Sun* chose (and used models to recreate) its own favourite nudes in art in response [E5]. In 2016, she collaborated with David Gilmour and Radio 6 Music (and later Radio 4) in presenting his concert in the first public performance in the amphitheatre at Pompeii since antiquity. In 2018, she brought Roman culture to car enthusiasts on *Grand Tour* ('If Amazon wants to make a series of James May driving Mary Beard around while discussing history, I'd like to let them know that I'd watch the show religiously', one viewer tweeted) [E6]. The citation for her Princess of Asturias Award explicitly mentioned 'her extraordinary talent for making specialized knowledge both accessible and relevant to the general public'; the announcement of her Getty medal underlined how she 'has illuminated the ancient world for countless readers and students' [E7].

## (3) Encouraging Engagement with Classics in Education

Beard has had a powerful impact in sustaining Classics in British education. Her programmes demonstrably prompted people of all ages and diverse backgrounds to study the ancient world, to take up Latin and to explore ancient sites: 'Went to Rome in my 20's, did nothing. Saw Mary Beard's Rome, went again, and have now, at 54, just completed my first year at the Open University studying a classics degree'; 'My daughter is studying Classical Studies at Exeter. Brought up in a Council house at one point homeless & always treading financial waters. One of her biggest inspirations? YOU. Thank you for making Classics accessible as a subject for her'. She has deployed her influence and reputation to support Classics in schools when under threat and inspired school drama (including a theatrical version of *SPQR*) and other activities [E8].

## (4) Influencing Wider Cultural and Social Practice

Beard's work has also impacted on cultural understanding. As presenter of BBC2's *Front Row Late/Inside Culture* she has introduced classical themes (from the *Odyssey* to Juvenal) into a general arts agenda. When the Royal Shakespeare Company put on the 'Roman Plays' in 2017, she advised director Angus Jackson, and debated with the actors the Roman historical background [E10]. Her programmes have positively influenced international cultural understanding. Part of *Ultimate Rome* was filmed in Algeria, putting its Roman sites into the limelight. The then ambassador wrote: 'The <Algerian> Government itself was impressed by the fact that prominent UK academics were taking an interest and this helped me, as Ambassador, to deploy the soft power <the programmes> generated . . . the "Mary Beard film" was an important tool for me . . . for encouraging the Algerians to trust the Brits.' The ambassador to Morocco writes: 'Mary's visit here has had an impact in ways I had not anticipated at the time – in women's empowerment, girls' education and in her continued interest in Morocco' [E11]. He adds that this impact 'has also helped with the UK-Morocco bilateral relationship'. In April 2020, the BBC exploited Beard's expertise and popularity in

bringing the ancient world to life to encourage social distancing during the pandemic, through her brief, Roman-themed, public information film (with c.47,000 views) [E12].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[E1] Television data : viewing figures from BBC for *Pompeii*, *Julius Caesar Revealed* and *Ultimate Rome: Empire without Limit*; overseas territories listing from Lion TV

[E2] Web and social media evidence: YouTube video of *Mary Beard's Ultimate Rome: Empire Without Limit - Episode 1* figures and viewers' comments official [link](#) & additional YouTube figures and viewer's comments [link](#); TLS Blog [link](#); twitter followers [link](#).

[E3] Media corroboration of Beard's television impact: Higgins, The Guardian, *The Cult of Mary Beard*, 31.01.18 [link \(p8\)](#); Stevens, Daily Mail, *Ultimate Rome: Empire without Limit* review 27.04.2016 [link \(p19\)](#); Voice of the Listener and Viewer Awards 2017 [link \(p22\)](#); Grierson Awards 2020 [link](#) & 2016 [link \(p34-5\)](#); Hodges, The Telegraph, *We need you: Help us choose this year's most pioneering woman in travel* 19.06.2019 [link \(p38\)](#).

[E4] Festival of Civilisations events at the National Gallery [link](#), in Cambridge [link](#), Liverpool [link](#), Belfast [link](#); online at the Open University [link](#) and app statistics

[E5] Popular press engagement with Shock of the Nude: Daily Mirror *Mary Beard rates 'soft porn for elite' as she unveils Top 10 naked works of art* 28.01.2020 [link](#); O'Connor, The Sun, *Are classic nudes just soft porn for toffs? We recreate famous ones* 13.02.2020

[E6] Romans on popular radio & television: Pompeii concert Bigmouth article, *Up Pompeii! David Gilmour meets Pink Floyd fan Mary Beard* 02.08.2020 [link](#); *Mary Beard goes on the Radcliffe & Maconie show today, to talk about David Gilmour's return to Pompeii* – BBC Radio 6 Music 11.07.2016 [link](#); BBC Radio 6 Music, Radcliffe & Maconie episode 11.07.2016 [link](#); Radio Times 02.10.2018 [link](#)

[E7] Award citations: Princess of Asturias Award for Social Sciences 2016 [link](#); Getty Medal 2019 [link](#)

[E8] Approximately twenty three Tweets and emails on Beard's influence on education and individual aspirations from the UK, Poland, and US. Quotations on p 1.

[E9] Emails re RSC collaboration 23.11.2016 – 26.01.2017

[E10] Testimony of former British Ambassador to Algeria

[E11] Testimony of British Ambassador to Morocco

[E12] Public information film on social distancing twitter 04.04.2020 [link](#)